

Second Sunday after Christmas

GRACE UPON GRACE

John 1:10-18

Second Sunday after Christmas

Analysis by Carolyn Schneider

10He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God. 14And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. 15(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") 16From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. 18No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

DIAGNOSIS: Seeing Is Not Believing

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) – *God's Word Is Not Received*

In the first verses of his gospel, John makes a connection between God's word and Jesus, who was born into this world but was not well received. It is not that people did not learn about Jesus or did not see what he did. They observed Jesus, but did

not consider him God's word lighting the darkness and bringing life into being. His work did not seem like God's work to them. This is still true about many people today.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) – God Is Not Understood

John's explanation for this poor reception is that no one really understands God, and, therefore, God is not recognizable to us, even when we do see God's glory right in front of us. Throughout his gospel, John draws the distinction between God's reality (the truth) and the world's reality (the lie). We are all so molded by the lie that we cannot even perceive the truth. God gave a great gift to the Israelite people by giving them the Law through Moses, so that at least they could know God's policies. These policies explain God's reality but they do not create it. The Law is not God's action for us but it is God's description of what our action should be. Following these policies makes the world livable, but it does not make the world new. The Law can show us what is good for us, but it cannot bring life out of death or good out of evil. It can expose what is not true and what leads to death, but it cannot overcome it. This is why people do not recognize the truth in Jesus; they have never seen the truth realized.

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) – God Is Rejected

John's gospel shows Jesus drawing people to himself rather than to the Law, claiming that to be connected with Jesus is to be connected with God. John's words resonate with Ephesians 1:3-6, which rejoices that this was God's plan from the beginning of the world. But this grace and truth strike us as new and strange because they are at odds with our reality (the lie). People know from the Law that God loves us and wants us to live and to love in return. But Jesus is going further than this, using family language instead of legislative language to say that God also wants to be with us. God wants to be related to us. It is the

same promise that God gave through prophets like Jeremiah, when he tells the people in exile that God will bring them home, for God has “become a father to Israel and Ephraim is my firstborn” (Jeremiah 31:9). But many of us refuse to be drawn. We know that the Law is from God. But Jesus? Who knows where he is from? Yet, to prefer the Law is to reject God in person. This misses the point, even of the Law. This is to stay in the world’s reality when God welcomes you into God’s reality. The world’s reality can only destroy.

PROGNOSIS: God Creates Believers

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) – *God Persists With Grace*

God takes pity on us, showing grace and truth even to those who reject God. This is God’s heart, which Jesus explains by living it out as the Word become flesh. John calls him the Lamb chosen by God to bear away the sin of the world. So he takes our rejection into his body on the cross and dies with it. But as John says, “We have seen his glory” (v. 14). He was raised by God in spite of our rejection, and still invites us to himself in a reality with God beyond our rejection.

Step 5: Advanced Prognosis (Internal Solution) – *God Is Understood*

Jesus’ life is now so full that it overflows to incorporate us. Out of his fullness we receive grace from God wherever we turn. To be carried into this reality is to be saved, as Jesus’ name implies: the Lord saves. To believe in this name is to trust that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the one chosen by God for this saving purpose. God’s kindness (“hesed” in Hebrew) and faithfulness (“emeth” in Hebrew), long linked in the scriptures to express God’s loyalty, now have taken on flesh in the life of Jesus, whose loyalty to us as Savior extends through death to life, through sin to forgiveness. We can say that we know God’s

heart, even intimately, because we are with Jesus, who comes from the heart of God.

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) – *God's Power Is Received*

To claim that we know God's heart is to claim that we have God's Spirit. John urges us to be just this bold! He tells us that we have been given power to become children of God, conceived by the Creator. This is how we have the courage to die and be born anew, since we know that this is the way the Lord saves. Both Johns, in fact, testify to this. John the Evangelist testifies to the gracious glory of Jesus, and John the Baptizer calls us to repent, to die to the lie in which we are bound up, because we are in the hands of the first Creator who makes all things from nothing. God is giving birth to a new creation of people, and we are in God's truthful and creative image, not in the destructive image of the lie. Now, when we see the light shining in the darkness, we can recognize it as Christ, our hope (Ephesians 1:12).